

## **Early Explosions – Collaborations with Stirling Colgate in the 1960's**

### **Two funny stories from Richard White:**

The first tale requires little background except that it occurred during the Second Texas Symposium on Relativistic Astrophysics held in Austin TX in December 1964:

One noontime Stir managed to borrow a couple of rackets and some tennis balls. We set out to play a couple of sets at around noontime. Though the calendar said winter, the temperature hovered around 80 degrees. We played one set and started a second when a north wind hit us. At first it was just a bit gusty and we played on. But then, I recall throwing the ball up for a serve just as a strong blast of wind hit and carried the ball several feet to my right, out of my reach. On a second try, I got the serve off but the wind blew the ball in a wide arc and Stir (exhibiting his usual exuberance) fell on his flat on his face stretching but failing to reach it. We decided it was time to stop. Within several hours, the wind became a steady chilly blast. The temperature dropped to near freezing. I'd never experienced such a radical change in the weather in so short a time. I inquired of one of the locals whether this was a frequent occurrence. He replied "Oh, that's just a Norther comin' in." His tone of voice and facial expression as he uttered the Texas word "Norther" suggested that it was some of that damn Yankee weather coming along to spoil the day.

The second story doesn't involve Stir but it gives a taste of Willie Fowler's notorious elfish sense of humor. It requires a little background that I've copied out of the notes I previously sent you:

The Symposium focused mainly upon the mystery of Quasars. (discovered by Maarten Schmidt in 1963) At the time, it was not yet established whether they are very distant objects or, possibly, objects within our own galaxy even as close as the edge of the solar system. They were known only as very powerful radio sources; their positions in the sky were not yet well defined and their distances from Earth were open to debate. Alan Sandage presented his study of what he called "Blue Stellar Objects". He found these optical sources were consistently paired with the Quasar radio frequency sources and cautiously opined that they were the source of the Quasars' radio frequency emissions. Burbidge and Fowler presented one of their several speculative papers attempting to reconcile the

luminosities of the Quasars with reasonable models.

When the Symposium ended, most of the participants boarded a plane to Waco and then on to Dallas. The plane, a small, twin engine, prop driven model (DC3?) accommodated 30 to 40 passengers. Virtually the all passengers were participants from the conference. There were two rows of two seats. I sat in a window seat, approximately mid-plane. Willie Fowler had the aisle seat next to me.

Soon after take off, when the seat belt lights went off, Fowler stood up, stepped into the aisle, placed his hand over his brow as if to shield his eyes from a blinding light. He faced forward where sat John Wheeler, Charlie Misner, Alan Sandage, Maarten Schmidt and others. Fowler, still shielding his eyes, turned to look directly across the aisle to see Chandrasekhar. Then he turned again, to face the rear of the plane, viewing Geoff and Margaret Burbidge, Jim Bardeen, Fred Hoyle, Walter Sullivan (science writer and editor for the NY Times) and others that I don't recall. Then he proclaimed in a voice that could be heard throughout the aircraft: "If this plane were to crash, we could get a new start on this Quasar problem."